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EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION OFFICE  
WINTHROP, IOWA

## THE 1950 FALL MIGRATION OF WATERFOWL THROUGH THE FORNEY AREA, FREMONT COUNTY, IOWA<sup>1</sup>

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AMES, IOWA

During the period of August 17 to December 17, 1950, daily observations of the fall flight of waterfowl through Forney Lake Game Refuge and Public Shooting Ground in Fremont County, Iowa, were made (Teer, 1951). Enumeration of the waterfowl was accomplished by the direct count of flocks containing less than 100 birds and by the segment count of flocks containing more than 100 birds. A 7x35 binocular was used to facilitate correct identification of the waterfowl.

Little migration was evident until the week of September 3-9. During this week, small flocks of Blue-winged Teal, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Baldpate, and Mallard were noted especially in the shallow water areas south of the Forney Area. Of 15,386 ducks and geese observed prior to October 20, the opening date of the waterfowl hunting season, 8,612 were pond ducks, 6,747 were geese, and 27 were diving ducks. Most of the waterfowl were forced south by cold, windy weather on November 9, the first inclement weather of the season. The main flights of the mallard and the diving ducks were precipitated by this cold front. Ducks, most of which were Mallards, rafted on the Forney Area from November 9 until the termination of the study. Few waterfowl other than Mallards were recorded after the hunting season closed on November 23 (Table 1).

### POND DUCKS

A total of 32,980 Mallards, the most numerous duck, were counted from September 3 to December 17. The peak of the flight occurred during the week of November 5-11, and during this week, 18,100 were recorded. After November 9, Mallards rafted on the Forney Area in concentrations varying in content from a few hundred to as many as 10,000 birds on one occasion (November 10). The Mallards utilized the airholes in the ice, leaving them once or twice daily to feed in the neighboring cornfields. The increase during the week of December 10-16 may have been birds that moved back north following three or four days of relatively sunny warm weather.

Few Pintails migrated through the Forney Area until the week of October 1-7. On October 7, an estimated 500 birds in 16 flocks were observed flying south. Hunting pressure in North and South Dakota may have been responsible for this increase, for the waterfowl hunting season opened in those two states on October 6. The main flight occurred between October 15 and November 3. By the end of the second week of the hunting season, the Pintail migration was over for the most part; 66 of the 78 that were harvested at the Forney Area were taken during these two weeks. Glover (1948) observed two distinct waves of migrating Pintails in 1947, the first beginning in mid-October and the second beginning during the last part of November.

Blue-winged Teal were the earliest migrants of all the species of waterfowl, and most had migrated through before the season opened. The trend

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of Blue-winged Teal migration was one of increasing numbers from the week of September 3-9 until the week of September 24-30. After this date, a steady decline in numbers of Blue-winged Teal occurred. By the end of the first week of the hunting season, the flight of this species was over. Of the 66 that were harvested during the hunting season, 58 were taken during the first week.

Green-winged Teal were uncommon until the week of October 1-7. This little duck was observed in greatest numbers in the shallow sloughs south of the Forney Area. Prior to the hunting season, 918 were recorded, and as many probably passed through during the season. With each new cold wave, more Green-winged Teal were observed on the area. The greatest number was observed during the week of October 8-14 (Table 1). A decline both in the number observed and the harvest occurred after that week.

Baldpate migration showed a noticeable increase during the week of October 1-7. Before the hunting season, 519 were recorded. Baldpates were nearly always present in the Pintail flocks, and the main flight appeared to parallel that of the Pintail. They were never abundant during the hunting season, and those that were harvested usually were taken from small flocks or from mixed flocks of other pond ducks.

Only four Gadwalls were recorded prior to the hunting season. The few that were seen during the hunting season usually were in small flocks or in company with Baldpates or Pintails. Fifty-five Gadwalls were harvested at the Forney Area; 44 of these were shot between October 27 and November 9.

Shovellers straggled through in small groups; the largest flock that was recorded was a group of eight. Only 28 were recorded prior to the hunting season; however, 62 were harvested during the season.

Wood Ducks were noted on the first day of observation. Small flocks of 1 to 12 members, possibly family groups, were witnessed about the marsh. Checks of the morning and evening flights disclosed that between 60 and 75 Wood Ducks came into the lake at dusk and departed at daybreak. As the season progressed, the number of Wood Ducks utilizing the lake increased. On October 20, when the duck season opened, 250 were estimated to have been present. Perhaps some of these were migrants; however, their behavior was no different from that of the birds seen during August and September. The resident Wood Duck population apparently moved south after the hunting season opened; only five were harvested.

#### DIVING DUCKS

The cold weather of November 9 apparently forced the diving ducks south as a unit, especially the Lesser Scaup. The peak of the flight passed through the area between November 3 and 9 (Table 1).

Redhead migration was more extended, but, like the Lesser Scaup, they were observed in greatest numbers during the week of November 3-9. Fifty-nine Redheads were harvested at the Forney Area. Less than 400 probably migrated through the Forney Area during 1950.

Ring-necked Duck migration was earlier than that of the Lesser Scaup and Redhead. None was observed prior to the hunting season, and all of the 31 that were harvested were taken during the first three weeks of the season.

Ruddy Ducks and Canvasbacks were not numerous during the fall migration. Three Ruddy Ducks were recorded prior to the season, and 14 of the 19 that were harvested were bagged during the week of October 27 to November 2. The harvest of only 12 Canvasbacks suggested that only a small number passed through during 1950. One American Golden-eye female was bagged. Apparently the bird is uncommon in fall migration; however, the American Golden-eye has been recorded in small numbers in spring migra-



TABLE 1. DATES OF FIRST AND LAST OBSERVATION AND PERIODS OF MAIN FLIGHT OF WATERFOWL, FORNEY AREA, FALL, 1950.

Species	First Observation	Main Flight	Last Observation
Mallard	Sept. 3	Nov. 5-11	Dec. 17
American Pintail	Sept. 3	Oct. 15-Nov. 3	Nov. 19**
Blue-winged Teal	Aug. 22	Sept. 24-30	Nov. 23**
Green-winged Teal	Sept. 3	Oct. 8-14	Nov. 23**
Baldpate	Sept. 6	Oct. 15-Nov. 3	Nov. 22**
Gadwall	Oct. 3	Oct. 27-Nov. 9	Nov. 11**
Shoveller	Aug. 22	No data	Dec. 3
Wood duck	Aug. 17*	No data	Nov. 20**
Redhead	Oct. 21**	Nov. 3-9	Dec. 6
Lesser Scaup	Oct. 4	Nov. 3-9	Nov. 20**
Ring-necked Duck	Oct. 21**	Oct. 21-Nov. 9	Nov. 8**
Ruddy Duck	Oct. 12	Oct. 27-Nov. 2	Nov. 18
Canvasback	Oct. 31**	No data	Dec. 6
Bufflehead	Oct. 8	No data	Nov. 12
American Golden-eye	Nov. 20**	No data	No data
Hooded Merganser	Nov. 1*	No data	Nov. 12
American Merganser	Oct. 30	No data	Nov. 19**
Lesser Snow Goose	Oct. 9	Oct. 9-21	Nov. 16**
Canada Goose	Oct. 12	Oct. 12-21	Dec. 17
White-fronted Goose	Oct. 13	No data	Oct. 31**
Blue Goose	Oct. 9	Oct. 9-21	Nov. 19**
Coot	Aug. 17*	Oct. 14 & Nov. 2	Dec. 17

\* Summer resident.

\*\* Record established from bagged birds.

tion in Iowa (Low, 1941; Provost, 1946; and Glover, 1950). Three Buffleheads were observed; none was harvested.

Mergansers were not common during the fall migration. Three Hooded Mergansers were observed, and one was bagged. Two flocks of American Mergansers totaling 16 birds were recorded; seven were harvested. No Red-breasted Mergansers were seen or harvested.

#### GEESE AND COOT

Four species of geese, Canada, Lesser Snow, Blue and White-fronted were observed. Lesser Snow Geese, Blue Geese, and Canada Geese were recorded first during the week of October 8-14, and White-fronted Geese were recorded first during the week of October 15-20 (Table 1). Of the 6,747 geese recorded prior to the hunting season, 5,842 were Lesser Snow Geese; 474 Blue Geese; 391, Canada Geese; and 40, White-fronted Geese. Few flocks composed entirely of Blue Geese were recorded; most were in company with Snow Geese and comprised from 5 to 10 percent of the individuals in the mixed flocks.

Most of the geese that arrived prior to the hunting season remained in the vicinity south of the Forney Area until the second day of the hunting season, October 21. During these two days, 4,500 were estimated to have been in the area. Flocks were seen flying first north and then south over Forney Lake, presumably seeking places of safety. Most were flying high, and few came down to investigate the lake. After this period geese were not numerous. The goose harvest comprised 25 birds and was composed of 12 Lesser Snow Geese, 8 Canada Geese, 4 Blue Geese, and 1 White-fronted Goose.

American Coots were present on the area when the study was initiated, but they were not plentiful until October 3, when an estimated 250 appeared. Two distinct peaks were observed, the first on October 14, and the second on November 2, with estimates of 1,800 and 3,500 birds, respectively. They were common on the area throughout the hunting season, and 91 were har-

vested by the hunters. A brood of Coots was seen on August 29. This observation was the only evidence of any species of waterfowl nesting on the Forney Area.

#### SUMMARY

1. Records of first and last observation and trends of the flights of 22 species of waterfowl through the Forney Lake area, Fremont County, Iowa, were established from sight observations and from the harvest of waterfowl at the Forney Area managed shooting ground between August 17 and December 17, 1950.

2. The Mallard was the most abundant species counted. A total of 32,980 were recorded during the study. None of the other species of waterfowl approached the Mallard in numbers.

3. The Mallard, Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, and Baldpate comprised the bulk of the pond ducks, with the Lesser Scaup, Redhead, and Ring-necked Duck, representing the greater part of the diving ducks.

4. Of 6,747 geese recorded prior to the hunting season, 5,842 were Lesser Snow Geese; 474, Blue Geese; 391, Canada Geese; and 40, White-fronted Geese. The main goose flight was over by October 21, which was the second day of the waterfowl hunting season. Occasionally a flock passed through during the season.

5. Coots were common on the area from October 3 until the close of the study. Two distinct peaks of abundance were observed, the first on October 14, and the second on November 2.

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## AN EXPERIENCE WITH A SAW-WHET OWL

By EARNEST W. STEFFEN

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

(With a drawing by the author)

On the evening of March 13, 1952, we received a telephone call that was noteworthy because the outcome made it possible for us to have a Saw-whet Owl in our home for a few weeks. When I answered Mrs. Morrison, wife of Dr. W. J. Morrison, told me that she had an injured baby owl. She wanted to know what and how to feed it. The conversation ended by her offering to let us take the bird to see what we could do with it. When we called at Mrs. Morrison's home for the owl, we discovered that she had, instead of a baby owl, an adult Saw-whet Owl, which had been injured in some way. One eye was closed, he couldn't fly, and he seemed rather badly ruffled as a result of his unfortunate experience, whatever that might have been.

During the first day we had him we merely allowed him to rest, but on the second day we force-fed him some beef. By this time he had strength enough to use his claws. They were sharp as needles, and I learned quickly to use gloves when handling him. However, that was the only time we had to force-feed him. Thereafter, he took beef when he was coaxed by lifting his upper mandible with the piece of meat on the end of tweezers. It took patience but he gradually learned to take the meat from the tweezers without coaxing.

On Sunday (we had had him about three days) he was unable to fly at all. I had him perched in a spruce and took some kodachrome pictures of him. He attempted a few times to take off, but couldn't make it at all. By Tuesday he was able to fly 6 or 7 feet and gain a little altitude. By that time too, he was accepting food from the tweezers somewhat more readily.

On the Sunday a week later, he could fly about the room quite well. That day Dr. Karl Goellner visited us and became interested in the owl. In the evening the Goellner family brought a live sparrow. We put the sparrow into the cage with the owl without expecting to see any immediate action, but as quick as a flash the owl struck with both feet and instantly the sparrow was dead. The action was unbelievably fast. The sparrow was dead before it could even utter a sound. The owl was all business until he was sure his prey was dead, then with one foot grasping it there came into his eyes a steady, challenging look as he seemed to dare us to be so foolish as to touch that which was his. Miss Myra Willis, who later borrowed our little owl to take to Wilson High School for class observation, reported the same procedure when a sparrow was turned loose with him — the same rapid action, and the same instant death of the sparrow.

Before a week had passed the owl's eye was well. At the end of two weeks we decided that he should be released. By this time he had become



"... TURNED SHARPLY AND ALIGHT-  
ED ON A LIMB OF A CEDAR TREE."



quite tractable. When being fed he became playful. When a piece of meat was presented he would back off, fluff his feathers, rise on his toes, and sometimes bob up and down in a rather comical manner. Then suddenly he would pounce upon the meat in mock ferocity. By the time he had eaten three or four pieces he lapsed into a mellow mood, and after eating a few more pieces he became decidedly gentle and sleepy. He would blink his eyes slowly and sleepily, and we could push him around without his offering much objection. However he never gave up snapping his bill whenever anyone first approached him, unless one made the approach very slowly.

While we had him he killed and ate three sparrows. From this limited observation it seems that the procedure in eating a sparrow is to first pluck off most of the feathers, particularly the large ones. The bottom of his cage was always well littered with feathers. The legs were clipped off and never eaten. But after consuming the plucked bird, he then cleaned up most of the feathers. Only the long tail and wing feathers and the legs were left uneaten. Following the eating of a sparrow he would in due time regurgitate pellets as any self-respecting owl should do.

To have a Saw-whet Owl in the house was a rare opportunity. I was able to make both pencil and color sketches from a living specimen at close range, an opportunity seldom enjoyed. I admired his soft plumage — upper parts a deep reddish brown with dull white markings, under parts dull white with irregular, broad streaks of pale rufus, legs and toes covered with cream-colored feathers like the softest fur, eye-disks largely pale gray. The yellow-irised eyes had a steady, pensive gaze or a challenging and fearless stare.

How admirable wild things are! They ask only for their most precious birthright, freedom — freedom to take their chances with predators, storms, starvation, peril on every hand; freedom to live dangerously. They ask no odds. Security to them is nothing. Only humans are so debased that they will barter freedom for a doubtful security.

It came time to think about giving our little owl his precious freedom. We had had him three weeks and he was well again. We thought it fitting that Mrs. Morrison, who found him, should have the privilege of turning him loose in her spacious grounds where he might take up where he had left off. About dusk we took him to her home and there she allowed him to go free. He took off rather wildly, then realizing that he was free, turned sharply, and alighted on a limb of a cedar tree in the yard. After sitting there for a while, he suddenly seemed to take a new interest in his surroundings. He became very alert, looked about quickly, then flew to a tall oak tree where he was lost to view among the brown leaves still clinging to the branches.

We speculated afterward as to where he went. Saw-whet Owls are migratory, so without doubt he was late for his rendezvous with others of his kind. Perhaps he was due in the northern part of his summer range near the Arctic Circle. Or perhaps his summer home is in Iowa. I suggest that from the number of Saw-whet Owl observations in this area in recent years, these owls may be more numerous than most people think, since they are very adept at hiding, are decidedly nocturnal in habit, and are usually silent. Thus observations are not too common even though the Saw-whet Owl population may be higher than seems apparent.

#### THE CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS

will be taken as usual between December 20 and 30. Study the form of censuses published in previous March issues and follow details carefully. List the birds in the A. O. U. order, giving exact number seen, and include data on hours, weather and ground conditions. Send your list to the Editor of "Iowa Bird Life" not later than January 15. This is the closing date on our tabulation of censuses and lists received after that cannot be included.

## SPRING MIGRATION DATES FROM THE SIOUX CITY REGION

By WILLIAM YOUNG WORTH  
SIOUX CITY, IOWA

This list will not include the first spring arrival date of many borderline species which can almost be classed as year-around residents, such as the Robin, Meadowlark, Mourning Dove, some of the blackbirds, several species of hawks and some of the waterfowl. The following species are listed with their earliest spring arrival dates over the period of years from 1919 to 1952. Roberts' "Birds of Minnesota" has been my guide in this project. The fine sections on arrival and departure for each species form an admirable addition to those volumes, as well as a hint for anyone considering the writing of a new "Birds of Iowa". Many pleasant hours can be spent comparing your own migration records with those of Minnesota. This adds greatly to the pleasures of bird watching for any serious bird student.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Eared Grebe, April 3, 1932.               | White-rumped Sandpiper, May 6, 1928.     |
| Pied-billed Grebe, April 3, 1932.         | Least Sandpiper, May 2, 1930.            |
| White Pelican, April 9, 1939.             | Dowitcher, May 13, 1931.                 |
| Double-crested Cormorant, April 28, 1936. | Stilt Sandpiper, May 11, 1932.           |
| Little Blue Heron, May 22, 1951.          | Semi-palmated Sandpiper, April 27, 1931. |
| Green Heron, May 10, 1930.                | Hudsonian Godwit, May 13, 1931.          |
| Black-crowned Night Heron, May 13, 1931.  | Wilson's Phalarope, May 2, 1930.         |
| Bittern, April 18, 1930.                  | Herring Gull, March 8, 1936.             |
| Gadwall, April 3, 1933.                   | Ring-billed Gull, March 15, 1930.        |
| Baldpate, March 15, 1936.                 | Franklin's Gull, March 24, 1938.         |
| Pintail, Feb. 15, 1952.                   | Common Tern, April 23, 1950.             |
| Green-winged Teal, March 18, 1928.        | Least Tern, May 19, 1929.                |
| Blue-winged Teal, March 22, 1935.         | Black Tern, May 11, 1929.                |
| Shoveler, March 15, 1936.                 | Yellow-billed Cuckoo, May 12, 1949.      |
| Wood Duck, April 8, 1951.                 | Black-billed Cuckoo, May 18, 1951.       |
| Redhead, March 18, 1928.                  | Burrowing Owl, March 29, 1936.           |
| Ring-necked Duck, March 18, 1928.         | Whip-poor-will, May 17, 1928.            |
| Canvas-back, March 23, 1941.              | Nighthawk, May 15, 1949.                 |
| Lesser Scaup Duck, March 25, 1930.        | Chimney Swift, April 14, 1933.           |
| Buffle-head, March 25, 1930.              | Ruby-throated Hummingbird, May 5, 1928.  |
| Ruddy Duck, April 4, 1935.                | Eastern Kingbird, April 30, 1938.        |
| Hooded Merganser, April 8, 1951.          | Arkansas Kingbird, May 2, 1951.          |
| Turkey Vulture, April 18, 1946.           | Crested Flycatcher, May 2, 1951.         |
| Osprey, April 28, 1951.                   | Eastern Phoebe, March 22, 1936.          |
| King Rail, May 14, 1930.                  | Traill's Flycatcher, May 7, 1933.        |
| Sora, May 2, 1951.                        | Least Flycatcher, April 30, 1930.        |
| American Coot, April 3, 1932.             | Eastern Wood Pewee, May 6, 1927.         |
| Semi-palmated Plover, May 2, 1930.        | Olive-sided Flycatcher, May 9, 1930.     |
| Killdeer, March 10, 1934.                 | Tree Swallow, April 17, 1931.            |
| Wilson's Snipe, April 4, 1935.            | Bank Swallow, April 19, 1942.            |
| Upland Plover, May 11, 1929.              | Rough-winged Swallow, April 17, 1932.    |
| Spotted Sandpiper, May 2, 1930.           | Barn Swallow, April 22, 1934.            |
| Scitary Sandpiper, April 28, 1931.        | Cliff Swallow, April 26, 1934.           |
| Western Willet, April 30, 1931.           | Purple Martin, March 29, 1950.           |
| Greater Yellow-legs, May 2, 1930.         | House Wren, April 17, 1946.              |
| Lesser Yellow-legs, April 3, 1933.        | Winter Wren, April 24, 1951.             |
| Pectoral Sandpiper, April 17, 1937.       |  |



- Carolina Wren, May 3, 1951.  
 Prairie Marsh Wren, April 28, 1931.  
 Short-billed Marsh Wren, April 30, 1930.  
 Mockingbird, June 7, 1942.  
 Catbird, May 1, 1949.  
 Brown Thrasher, April 18, 1948.  
 Wood Thrush, May 2, 1930.  
 Hermit Thrush, April 15, 1944.  
 Olive-backed Thrush, April 30, 1948.  
 Gray-cheeked Thrush, May 3, 1936.  
 Willow Thrush, May 10, 1933.  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, April 15, 1949.  
 American Pipit, April 29, 1929.  
 Migrant Shrike, March 15, 1936.  
 White-eyed Vireo, May 14, 1934.  
 Bell's Vireo, May 11, 1932.  
 Yellow-throated Vireo, May 4, 1941.  
 Blue-headed Vireo, May 8, 1929.  
 Red-eyed Vireo, May 5, 1930.  
 Warbling Vireo, April 24, 1930.  
 Black & White Warbler, April 30, 1946.  
 Prothonotary Warbler, May 11, 1929.  
 Blue-winged Warbler, April 30, 1930.  
 Tennessee Warbler, May 4, 1941.  
 Orange-crowned Warbler, April 26, 1932.  
 Nashville Warbler, May 9, 1933, 1946.  
 Parula Warbler, May 11, 1934.  
 Yellow Warbler, April 22, 1946.  
 Magnolia Warbler, May 9, 1930.  
 Cape May Warbler, May 9, 1930.  
 Myrtle Warbler, April 14, 1927.  
 Black-throated Green Warbler, May 12, 1931.  
 Blackburnian Warbler, May 15, 1951.  
 Chestnut-sided Warbler, May 13, 1948.  
 Bay-breasted Warbler, May 20, 1950.  
 Black-poll Warbler, May 5, 1930.  
 Palm Warbler, April 26, 1932.  
 Oven-bird, May 1, 1928.  
 Grinnell's Water-thrush, May 3, 1948.  
 Louisiana Water-thrush, May 9, 1930.  
 Mourning Warbler, May 16, 1929.  
 Northern Yellow-throat, May 3, 1934.  
 Yellow-breasted Chat, May 13, 1928.  
 Wilson's Warbler, May 9, 1948.  
 Canada Warbler, May 18, 1951.  
 American Redstart, May 9, 1930.  
 Bobolink, May 19, 1930, 1934.  
 Yellow-headed Blackbird, April 13, 1930.  
 Orchard Oriole, May 4, 1941.  
 Baltimore Oriole, April 26, 1941.  
 Brewer's Blackbird, March 16, 1935.  
 Eastern Cowbird, March 6, 1938.  
 Scarlet Tanager, May 11, 1932.  
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak, April 26, 1939.  
 Blue Grosbeak, May 11, 1934.  
 Indigo Bunting, May 9, 1930.  
 Lazuli Bunting, May 15, 1950.  
 Dickcissel, May 3, 1948, 1951.  
 Red-eyed Towhee, April 11, 1930.  
 Savannah Sparrow, April 4, 1933.  
 Grasshopper Sparrow, April 26, 1932.  
 Vesper Sparrow, April 8, 1931.  
 Lark Sparrow, April 25, 1932.  
 Chipping Sparrow, April 3, 1930.  
 Clay-colored Sparrow, April 24, 1930.  
 Field Sparrow, March 27, 1927.  
 White-crowned Sparrow, April 30, 1948.  
 White-throated Sparrow, April 22, 1933.  
 Fox Sparrow, March 22, 1936.  
 Lincoln's Sparrow, April 19, 1948.  
 Swamp Sparrow, April 24, 1931.

In doing a little recapitulating we find that most of our woodpeckers can be found here the year around. Song Sparrows, Harris Sparrows, and Arctic Towhees are often found here during the winter. Kingfishers sometimes winter here, and I have late November and one January record for the Great Blue Heron, so even our winter birding can be interesting. The March 29, 1950, record of the Purple Martin turned out to be a tragedy. Most bird students will well remember that disastrous March-end blizzard of 1950, from which the martin flocks may be years in recovering.

The record for the Cowbird on March 6, 1938, is an unusual one. The only other spring arrival date for this area that compares to it, is one given in "Birds of Minnesota" for Faribault County on March 12, 1898. The Cowbird that I recorded was feeding with a flock of English Sparrows on the waste grain that seeps out of railroad cars. This bird allowed close approach and, when it finally flew, it did not evidence any sign of being a cripple.

Some spring seasons seem to be more conducive to early migration than others. Whether this is due to favorable air currents, temperature, lack of storms or other natural causes, we do not know. We do know, however, that

the spring of 1930 is still our banner year for setting early arrival records. More intensive field work was done during the years 1931-1936 than in 1930, but this latter year holds the record for 28 first arrivals in my record-book.

#### GENERAL NOTES

**Early record of Lesser Yellow-legs in Wapello County.**—On July 13, 1952, I saw and heard a Lesser Yellow-legs (*Totanus flavipes*), at the Ottumwa Municipal Airport. This is the earliest recorded date in fall migration that I have for this species in Wapello County.—CHARLES C. AYRES, JR., Ottumwa, Iowa.

**Chestnut-sided Warbler in Des Moines in Late June.**—On June 29, 1952, there was a Chestnut-sided Warbler near the Raccoon River in Waterworks Park. It was a male in breeding plumage with all field marks clearly visible in perfect light of mid-afternoon. This species is mentioned as breeding in this latitude, but I know of no records of its being observed in Polk County at this time of year.—WOODWARD BROWN, Des Moines, Iowa.

**Pine Siskin in Late May in Humboldt County.**—On May 24, 1952, I saw a Pine Siskin in our yard at Thor, Humboldt County, Iowa. It was perched on a fence, and flew back and forth from the fence to the ground, where it fed on dandelion seeds. I was about 2 yards from the bird, and I watched it closely for a few minutes while I noted its heavily streaked breast and yellow wing patch. On the same day I added the Connecticut Warbler to my life list. I saw it near the ground in a boxelder tree. Its white eye-ring was very conspicuous.—DENNIS CARTER, Webster City, Iowa.

**Observations on Red-winged Blackbirds.**—A group of elderberry bushes about 50 feet from our house is a haven for Red-winged Blackbirds. Last year one pair came, nested, and raised two young ones. In 1952 three pairs built nests in bushes only a few feet apart, each nest with three or four eggs in it. Another pair of Red-wings built a nest in a nearby apple tree. In early morning there was great activity, when the birds chattered and scolded one another, especially when one got too near the other one's nests. When an outsider, such as Starling, sparrow or a cat, came prowling near, those blackbirds "ganged up" on him and soon put the intruder to flight.

I was much interested in how and what the parent birds fed their young, and I watched closely to see what was brought to the nests. At times the male bird participated in the feeding. He brought corn-borer moths, all sizes, some so large I wondered how he managed to push them down the throats of the young.

Their nest-building always took place early in the morning. They built about a fourth of the nest each day. For the beginning they got long stems of dried grass, usually from wild hay land near by; these they fastened to several branches and formed the basic structure of the nest. Then they wove in shorter bits of dried grass, and finally lined the inside with fine stems of bluegrass. I have even seen dried snake skins woven into the outer edge of the nest. How the female pulls and tugs at the bits of grass in order to get the nest the right shape to fit her body! The nest is a perfect bit of creation when finished, and so well built is it that heavy winds and rains will not dislodge it. I had a very colorful, interesting summer watching my bird neighbors.—MRS. ROBERT PARSONS, Dickens, Iowa.

**A Record of the Black Rail near Des Moines.**—Fisher's Lake is a shallow pond often visited by shore and water birds about two miles north of Des Moines. About noon on May 17, 1952, we went there to look for birds. So many fishermen were sitting on the banks about half way around the lake,

our expectations of shore birds had almost vanished when suddenly, as we stepped up the high bank of the highway, a Red-winged Blackbird dashed in panic from the cattails in the marshy growth below. Following closely was another, small bird with dangling legs and weakly flapping wings. This bird was dark, rusty black with whitish stripes on each side and the back speckled lightly with white. It seemed tailless as it dropped helplessly into the cattails some 20 feet away. Its plump, round body made it look like a chipmunk or some small animal trying out borrowed wings. This was a Black Rail, and my first record for it. So secretive are these little inhabitants of the marshes, very rarely is one seen. Their presence is usually unsuspected and they creep around in the grasses instead of flying, though occasionally they flush, as this one did, when taken by surprise.—OLIVIA McCABE, Des Moines, Iowa.

**Piping Plover in Wapello County, Iowa.**—On July 17, 1952, Oscar M. Root, of North Andover, Massachusetts, Frank Gallagher, Airport Policeman, and I saw a Piping Plover, (*Charadrius melodus*), at the Ottumwa Municipal Airport, formerly known as the U. S. Naval Air Station, which was constructed during World War II. The bird was on an extensive asphalt landing mat, through which were growing scattered tufts of low-growing vegetation. Due to recent rains shallow pools of water were standing on the mat. Although numerous Killdeer (34 by actual count) were present, the plover showed no inclination to associate with them. Revisiting the airport on July 19, in company with Miss Darleen Pullins, we again saw a bird of this species, this time on the cement approach in front of Hangar No. 1, and later on the north-south runway.

The Ottumwa Municipal Airport, located approximately 6 miles northwest of Ottumwa, comprises approximately 1400 acres in which all hunting and fishing is prohibited. Col. Lester G. Orcutt, Manager of the Airport, whose kind cooperation made it possible for us to explore the area, has given us permission to make a thorough study of the birdlife of this interesting section.

Since making the above observation we have studied the files of "Iowa Bird Life" and find the following Iowa records since DuMont's "Revised List of Iowa Birds" (1933):

May 3-19, 1934, 11 seen by Logan J. Bennett through Clay and Palo Alto Counties (VIII, p. 4).

June, 1940, 2 nests found by Bruce F. Stiles at Lake Manawa, Pottawattamie County (X, pp. 48-49).

June 17, 1943, 5 nests reported by Dr. J. Harold Ennis on sand flats along Missouri River near Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie County (XIV, p. 57).

May 11-13, 1945, three seen on spring census at Des Moines, Polk County (XV, p. 45).

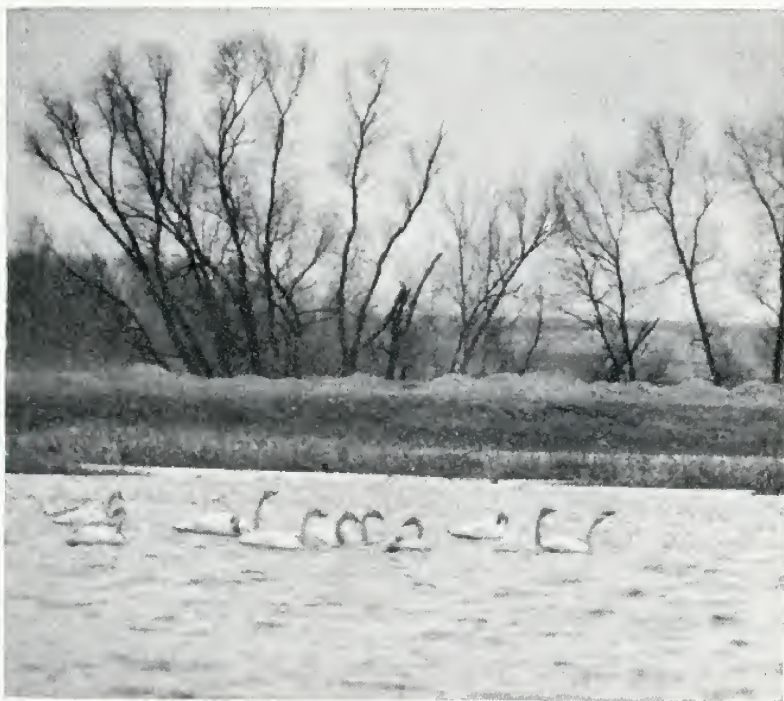
July 30, 1945, one dead bird found by James Hodges near Linwood, Scott County (XVI, p. 36).

April 26, 1946, one seen by Miss Lillian Serbousek at Amana Lake, Iowa County (XVI, p. 66).

May 13, 1946, two seen by Mr. and Mrs. Jack W. Musgrove and Mr. and Mrs. Maynard F. Reece in the Spirit Lake area (XVII, p. 17-18).—CHARLES C. AYRES, JR., Ottumwa, Iowa.

**Whistling Swans in Eastern Iowa.**—On April 14, 1952, Joyce Koym, Dorothy Marcue, Al Thiernan, David Ennis and I drove to Vinton, Iowa, after hearing a report that Whistling Swans were in that vicinity. Arriving about 6:30 p.m. at the farm home of Stanley Geater some 3 miles north of town, we were disappointed to hear that the swans had been frightened away earlier in the afternoon. We delayed our return a few minutes to ask questions of Mr.





#### WHISTLING SWANS

Reprinted from "Iowa Conservationist", courtesy of Iowa Conservation Commission.

Geater about these great birds. During that brief interval a flock of 24 magnificent Whistling Swans flew overhead and, after circling the area for five or six minutes, finally settled on the farm pond northeast of the farm house. By this time four carloads of other interested spectators had gathered in the farm yard, and Mr. Geater escorted us through the fields to the pond. There we watched the birds feeding at rather close range. Once the birds were settled on the pond and feeding, they appeared to be little interested in our cars or our movement on foot. The swans fed actively on the bottom of the pond by tipping after the manner of ducks. One of the men in the group said that two years previously he had sowed wild rice in the pond with the hope that wild ducks would be attracted. This source of food probably accounted for the presence of these uncommon birds. Also on the pond were three pairs of Blue-winged Teal and two pairs of Scaups.

It might be added that last year sportsmen reported a few swans south of Mt. Vernon along the Cedar River, but the item was not otherwise verified.—J. HAROLD ENNIS, Mt. Vernon, Iowa.

(According to "Iowa Conservationist", May, 1952, issue, Conservation Officer George Kaufman saw a flock of 94 Whistling Swans resting on the Mississippi River near Lansing, Iowa, in early April, 1952.—Ed.)

**A Critique on the New Check List of Iowa Birds.**—I was interested to read the "Check List of Iowa Birds" by Jack Musgrove, published as a supplement to the May, 1952, number of "Iowa Conservationist." It was surprising to notice the inaccuracies and misleading statements with which the list abounds. Some of the unsatisfactory aspects of the list may be stated

under two categories: 1) Palpable inaccuracies; 2) an unfortunate and misleading attempt to give each species a state-wide status rather than to give some indication of the variable status of species in different parts of the state. Some of the more obvious mistakes follow: Olive-sided Pewee which presumably refers to the Olive-sided Flycatcher, Trumpeter Swan, Eastern Turkey, and American Raven, listed as **EXTINCT** instead of **EXTIRPATED**. American Egret, common summer resident; it is also a summer visitor. Tree Swallow, common migrant; also a summer resident in various parts of the state. Carolina Wren, uncommon summer resident; but it is also a winter resident in southern Iowa. Yellow-throated Vireo, common migrant; however, it is well known as a summer resident in southern Iowa. Red-eyed Vireo, common migrant; in addition, it is also a common summer resident in many counties. American Redstart, erroneously listed as a common migrant whereas it nests in many places in the state. Northern Pine Siskin, uncommon migrant; actually, not uncommon as a winter visitor also. Eastern Vesper Sparrow, common migrant; but also known to many people as a summer resident. Clay-colored Sparrow, common migrant; a few recent nesting records, however, are available.—OSCAR M. ROOT, North Andover, Mass.

**Records of Unusual Birds from the Davenport Area during 1951.**—The following records are of species not previously recorded from the Davenport area, or of otherwise rare, unusual, or irregular occurrence. The period covered in this report includes all of 1951 and January of 1952. As a basis of comparison we have referred to our own observations which have extended almost continuously from 1939 to the present date.

**HORNED GREBE.** Since 1939 we have had but four records of this species. In 1951 we made the following observations: February 10, 1 with American Mergansers and Golden-eyes below Dam 15; April 1 (1); April 10 (1); April 12 (2); October 20 (3); and October 28 (3).

**OLD SQUAW.** Our two previous records have been of birds shot by hunters but not seen by us. On March 4 and March 8, 1951, we found a female in a large flock of Golden-eyes and *Nyroca* between LeClaire and Princeton, Iowa. This was presumably the same individual. On November 23, 1951, a female was killed by hunters just below Dam 14. This bird was brought to the Davenport Public Museum by State Warden Chas. Adamson to whom we are also indebted for the record of the King Eider previously published. The bird has been mounted and is in the collection of the Museum.

**GOLDEN EAGLE.** On January 24, 1951, one of us (Morrissey) observed a peculiarly marked eagle with adult and immature Bald Eagles on a small island off Credit Island Park. This bird had a white tail with a sharply delimited, terminal black band. It appeared to have broader, stubbier wings than the Bald Eagles. It attacked the nearby Golden-eyes and mergansers persistently, and occasionally pursued other eagles. We have never seen Bald Eagles attack ducks except when attempting to rob them of fish they have caught. This same eagle was seen the next day by Fred Hall and Norwood Hazard, who felt certain that the bird's tarsi were feathered to the base of the toes. Because of our lack of experience with Golden Eagles in the field and because of the great variation in the plumages of young Bald Eagles, we prefer that our identification remain tentative.

**SWAINSON'S HAWK.** We have not found Swainson's Hawk to be as common in eastern Iowa as have other observers. On April 14 we saw 2 well-marked individuals near McCausland, Iowa, and on May 12 a single bird in the same area. These are our first records for Scott County.

**GOLDEN PLOVER.** In a 5-mile stretch of road near McCausland we have been fortunate to find Golden Plovers every year since 1949. In 1951 we count-

ed 20 on May 8; 56 on May 11; and 110 on May 13. Their migratory period appears to extend over a considerable period of time since we observed 6 in winter plumage on April 8 across the Mississippi from Clinton.

**FRANKLIN'S GULL.** We have observed this species only in 1950, in 1951, and in the fall of 1947. In 1951 we observed two groups of 2 and 3 on April 7 on the Mississippi, and 2 on April 10 at Credit Island Harbor.

**BARN OWL.** On January 11, 1952, Morrissey found a dead female Barn Owl in a sedge meadow near Duck Creek Park. The owl had apparently starved to death during a period of heavy snows and low temperature. It is now in the collection of the Museum of the State University of Iowa. It constitutes the third record for Scott County since 1900.

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH.** In most years one of these nuthatches during spring or fall migration is worthy of note. In the fall of 1951 a major invasion occurred. Our records are: September 10 (1); September 15 (1); September 17 (1); October 28, (1). Feeney also had a record of one Aug. 24 at Nolan Settlement near Iowa City. At least 3 wintered at Davenport at different feeding trays. One wintered at Rock Island, Illinois.

**LOUISIANA WATER-THRUSH.** One was recorded May 4 at Wildcat Den State Park. This is our first record for the Davenport area.

**WARBLERS.** The following are the total numbers of some of the less common warblers observed during the spring migration of 1951: Parula Warbler, 6 (one fall record); Golden-winged Warbler, 11; Blue-winged Warbler, 3; Cape May Warbler, 1; Mourning Warbler, 2; Kentucky Warbler, 4; Connecticut Warbler, 1.—**THOMAS MORRISSEY, THOMAS J. FEENEY, EDWARD C. GREER, Davenport, Iowa.**

**Duck Hawk Catching Green-winged Teal in Flight.**—At 5:30 p.m. on April 27, 1950, while walking through Central Addition in Ottumwa, Wapello County, Iowa, I flushed three Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*) from a small pond. As they flew away at a height of from 50 to 75 feet, a Duck Hawk (*Falco peregrinus*) swooped from above and behind the ducks and did what in aviation is called a "barrel roll", bringing it to an upside-down position directly under the center duck. From this position the hawk sunk its talons upward into the under side of the teal and immediately resumed a normal flying position, carrying the duck underneath in its talons. One of the teal's feet was clearly visible extending vertically upward at an angle of approximately 90 degrees to the bird's own body. The right leg was later found to be broken, probably by the hawk when it struck. Shortly the hawk disappeared over a stand of willow trees, flying toward a pond distant about 75 yards. Knowing that the Duck Hawk will often capture and release its prey without eating it, I followed the direction taken by the hawk to determine the final disposition made of its victim. On a mud flat at the northern edge of this pond, at a distance of about 20 feet from solid ground lay the teal, with tufts of feathers lying close by. When I came to the edge of the bank the bird flopped out several feet into shallow water but did not seem able to hold up its head, having a tendency to tip forward.

Being unable to retrieve the teal at that time, I returned to the pond the following morning, equipped with wading boots, and recovered the bird which was lying dead on the mud flat. There were some lacerations on the bird's body, but the principal wound appeared to be on the anterior part of the neck where the trachea was laid bare. Before disposing of the corpse, I took kodachrome pictures of it.—**CHARLES C. AYRES, JR., Ottumwa, Iowa.**

**Yellow-crowned Night Herons in Southwest Iowa.**—On July 24, 1952, we drove to a swamp between Riverton and Waubonsie and found three adult and four immature Yellow-crowned Night Herons. There may have been



more of them, as the swamp area is large and we saw herons flying at the other side but too far away for identification. The seven that we saw were near the road, giving us a close view of them. They paid no attention to us and were so near we hardly needed our glasses to look at them. On August 2 we went back; this time there were one adult and nine immature birds. In another part of the swamp, as we drove home, we saw another adult and two immature Yellow-crowns.—MRS. ROBERT I. BORDNER, Shenandoah, Iowa.

**Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Other Shore-birds near Des Moines.—**

On July 13, 1952, Miss Elizabeth Peck reported eight adult and two immature Yellow-crowned Night Herons in a field  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north of Des Moines. On July 15, with Albert Berkowitz we visited the area, and on Pinehill Drive, within 125 feet of the road, we saw two adult and one immature Yellow-crowns. We watched them for 15 or 20 minutes, and moved on to find a number of shore-birds, principally Killdeers and a few Pectoral Sandpipers, in a nearby field. We returned to the area the next afternoon, July 16, and saw 100 to 200 shore-birds in the same field. About 50 of these were Killdeers, but there were Lesser Yellow-legs, Pectoral and Solitary Sandpipers, and a Red-backed Sandpiper in fall plumage; many others were too far distant to be identified even with a 20x scope. Olivia McCabe and Bertha Miller a little later that day observed a Red-backed Sandpiper partially in breeding plumage. Only the immature Yellow-crown was seen that day and the adults could not be found.—WOODWARD H. BROWN, Des Moines, Iowa.



BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON  
From a drawing by E. W. Steffen

**Water Birds at Sweet Marsh.**—The state-owned Sweet Marsh, a waterfowl breeding refuge and public shooting ground near Tripoli in Bremer County, Iowa, is probably destined to become one of the best areas for the observation of water birds in eastern Iowa. Almost 1000 acres are under water, with large areas of open water, tree-covered islands, as well as marshes and sloughs which are partially water-covered.

With Robert Cleary, Iowa Fisheries Biologist, and Jack McSweeney, Unit Game Manager for the Iowa Conservation Commission and overseer of Sweet Marsh, I spent an interesting afternoon on August 26, 1952, when we explored the Marsh.

About 100 pairs of ducks had nested on the area during the summer. We saw some of these and others which were early arrivals from farther north. There were Mallards in fair numbers, a flock of 10 Pintails, and Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal. We saw four Pied-billed Grebes, numerous Sora Rails and Green Herons. About 50 Great Blue Herons were seen, and upward of 300 American Egrets. The population of egrets was estimated at 400 by Mr. McSweeney, but they were scattered over the entire area and not more than 50 were in sight at any one time. At least 300 appeared at the Marsh as early as July 25, according to Mr. McSweeney.

We wore rubber waders, which equipment is needed if one is to explore the area rather thoroughly. Leather or rubber boots are recommended for use at the Marsh, for, in spite of the fact that most of the rattlesnakes formerly inhabiting the area have been exterminated, some are still present. As we walked across one of the grassy islands, we came upon eight young rattlesnakes sunning themselves beside a log. Pulling his belt from his trousers, Mr. McSweeney used it to kill three of them before they got out of sight.—FRED J. PIERCE, Winthrop, Iowa.

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#### MEMBERSHIP NEWS

At a joint meeting of the Inland Bird Banding Association and the Illinois Academy of Science, held at Chicago in May, Myrle L. Jones of Boone, Iowa, was unanimously elected one of the vice-presidents of the Inland Association.

Dr. and Mrs. George Hendrickson enjoyed a vacation in the Denver region. Mr. and Mrs. George Crossley took a vacation trip to Glacier National Park early in July, and returned through the Black Hills and the Bad Lands. They camped at Two Medicine, Many Glacier, Waterton, and Bowman Lake camp grounds and did some hiking at each; the last-named place is the wildest area and is their favorite. They added 53 birds to their yearly list, and a few to their life list.

The Drs. Everett and Eunice (Mr. and Mrs.) Christensen, of Spencer, had a fine nine-day trip to Bonaventure Island in late July. They flew their airplane, 1½ days trip, to Caribou, Maine, then took a rent-a-car around the Gaspé Peninsula; from Percé, on the tip, they took a boat for the 3 miles across the bay to Bonaventure Island. They visited the Gannet rookery of which Mrs. Christensen writes: "The books have not exaggerated it in the least. The 18,000 to 20,000 pairs of nesting Gannets constantly coming and going to feed, leaving a mate in attendance at the nest, then the return with always a love token such as sea weed, grass or a feather with the billing and gesturing on arrival, is something one never tires of watching. They were fearless, allowing us to walk right to them and only defending as a goose would on too close approach. We saw nesting cormorants, murres, puffins, gulls and various others, and the island was alive with land birds, too. Members of the Audubon Society have compiled a total list of over 200 species through the years. After three days with the Gannets we had to leave for home."